

**DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH**  
**VICARIATE FOR FORMATION**



St. John's Catholic Primary School  
**Melbourne Street**  
**Tiverton**  
**EX16 5LB**

**URN 113496**

Head Teacher: Mrs Sally McCluskey  
Chair of Governors: Mr Andy Pryce

**S48 INSPECTION**  
**February 2013**

## **Introduction**

St. John's was inspected by Ofsted in December 2012 and was judged to be a good school with some outstanding features. The Diocesan Section 48 inspection identified some of the key strengths of St. John's School and also identified areas of focus required to further strengthen the life and work of the school. The inspection covered a wide range of issues and as a process it sought to be creative and to support the school in its on-going development as a Catholic community.

The inspection was conducted by Sarah Adams (Diocesan RE Adviser for Schools) working closely with the Headteacher, and the governors. The outcomes of the inspection are based on the following areas:

- documentation made available in school;
- scrutiny of pupils' work;
- observation of lessons;
- discussion with the members of staff, including the RE Co-ordinator
- meeting with the School Council which has pupils representing all ages within the school;
- meeting with the Parish Priest who is also the RE governor and a further governor
- participation in a whole school Mass for Ash Wednesday
- Meeting with the Head Teacher

## **Context**

St John's is a smaller than average-sized primary school with mainly white British children. A below-average number of children speak English as an additional language. Although the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below the national average the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school is situated some distance from the Parish Church which creates logistical difficulties for the school when they would like the children to participate in services at the Church.

During the inspection a significant number of key strengths were identified in the context of St. John's distinctive identity as a Catholic school, as factors in its educational success and its contribution to the Church's mission in education. This report sets out to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

## **Leadership**

As identified by Ofsted the strong leadership of the Head Teacher in particular, means that St. John's is a school that has made great progress and is going from strength to strength. Her drive and commitment to raising standards and ensuring that children thrive and learn is reaping rewards. Supported by a committed governing body, the Head Teacher sees the way forward in a deepening of the school's ethos and Catholic Life. The leadership is both proactive and reflective. An example of this would be the on-going consideration and discussions around what it is best to offer the children in terms of the worship life of the school. With so few Catholic children this can present difficulties. However, St. John's is a school committed to providing the best experience for all of the children who attend and ensuring that all are included and all have the opportunity to experience a rich liturgical prayer life.

The Head Teacher has worked hard to improve the ambience of the school and as a consequence there is now a very warm and welcoming entrance hall. This ensures that from the moment anyone enters the school they experience the openness and ease of the whole community. Equally she has been committed to raising the standard of displays throughout the school so that they reflect the children's work and a sense of industry throughout. There is a very real sense that everyone feels valued and accepted, something echoed by the children in their conversation about what they appreciate about the school.

## **Religious Life**

The religious life of St. John's permeates the school and is at the heart of everything that is being achieved. This is made evident in the scripture quotes that appear at various places around the school on its displays and attached to children's work. Displays and appropriate artefacts around the school speak of the ethos and the message of Christ. These are liturgically year sensitive as well as being creative and reflective. An example of this would be the beautiful Ash Wednesday focal display indicating the start of Lent adorned with children's Lent promises. Focal points in classrooms are developing. The more that teachers can encourage children to take ownership of these the more of a learning tool they will become.

St. John's has a rich and positive prayer life. The school takes time to reflect on what they offer the children and consideration to what works and what does not. The school has achieved the National Platinum Award for singing and the quality of singing by the children is exceptional. Their singing enhances the liturgy and on the day added to the prayerfulness of the Mass celebrated for Ash Wednesday. It is clear from the number of children involved in this celebration that children feel comfortable in larger acts of worship. Children from EYFS to Year 6 demonstrated their capacity to be reverent and responsive. Throughout the Mass the quality of stillness and capacity to be silent gave a sense that the children know how to be and how to respond appropriately. This is modelled for them by the adults within the community who engage fully with the prayer life of the school. Their gentle care of children who might have difficulty was obvious in the subtle ways that they

supported those who might otherwise struggle in such an environment. All the children received ashes in a very respectful and thoughtful manner.

The school has a clear pattern for liturgy and acts of worship established within the school. Classroom prayer is a regular part of the school day in addition to whole school acts of worship. While children are encouraged to take on some roles within these liturgies the school would benefit from a clear development plan for how children could take on greater responsibility for leading acts of worship. Although the school is not placed geographically well for the children to attend services in the Parish Church, strong links with the Parish community are growing. The Parish Priest is very committed to the school and two local deacons could be a valuable source for providing formation and support to the adults of the school in facilitating child led acts of worship.

## **Teaching in RE**

A number of lessons were observed during the course of this inspection. The children were coming to the end of their topic on Revelation. It was apparent from the children's responses that they enjoyed these lessons and achieving at age appropriate levels and above. Attainment in RE is progressing because of the attention that is being given to the quality of planning by the teachers. In nearly all lessons the children were being challenged in their thinking and their application of learning. For example in one lesson the children's understanding of the conversion of Saul was being applied to the children's own life. Children worked effectively in groups and showed a high level of capacity for arguing their point of view logically. One group talked about the internal force within that makes us respond in a particular way and the force that comes from outside. Written work in particular reflected the depth of thinking and application to the theme. The teacher's warm and enthusiastic approach to the children encouraged and brought out the best in them.

This encouraging approach was evident in all the lessons and as a consequence it drew from the children rich responses to the material. Positive, established routines, a clear sense of expectation, and children knowing their learning objectives were strong in all lessons. When children struggled it was mainly because the teacher had not managed to put in sufficient scaffolding for the children to be able to reach a clear understanding.

The use of photographs, taken in a previous lesson, helped younger children recall and retell the story of the feeding of the five thousand with enthusiasm and confidence. They were then able to think about this story in relation to their own life. For example one child said that he would share his pancakes with his family. The children demonstrated excellent recall and understanding of the story. One little boy said, "Jesus turned a little bit of food into a lot!"

Generally the teachers are demonstrating greater confidence in their teaching of RE. The planning is also developing and with further work on this in particular to ensure

that it includes driver words so that children can attain at higher levels, the teaching will go from strength to strength. It continues to be the case that pre-topic conversations are vital for understanding and application of the theology of the topic in question. The support of one of the deacons in this would be advantageous.

## **Pastoral Life of the School**

St. John's draws on children from a large variety of backgrounds and socio-economic situations. There are a significant number of children who have special needs, including an above average number of children with challenging behavioural needs. However, this is not obvious when walking around the school or sitting in classrooms. The adults and children of St. John's have a great deal of respect for one another and the warm relationships with clear boundaries and behavioural expectations ensure that children feel safe and well cared for. It was something that the children on the school council were keen to speak about. Whilst acknowledging that there may be the occasional act of bullying the general consensus from the children suggests that they know what to do and feel confident in the staff to respond to their needs.

This sense of pastoral care, rooted in the Catholic ethos of the school, permeates not only the daily life of the school but in the commitment the school has to reaching out to the wider community. It does this in a variety of ways, both charitably and through its music in particular. Singing for the elderly and at other events to raise money is a popular activity.

## **Areas of Focus for Development**

The school's mission as a Catholic School would be further enhanced by focusing planned development in the following areas.

1. Teaching and learning in RE is developing well. It will be enhanced by ensuring that there is a clear on-going programme for staff on how to plan for a topic and formation in their own knowledge and understanding of scripture and other theological concepts present in topics.
2. The development of a school 'chaplancy' team to ensure the above and to help in the formation of adults and children in preparing liturgy.
3. For the governing body to identify a specific governor who would be responsible for the Catholic Life of the School and oversee the above.

## **Conclusion**

St. John's is a school with enormous potential that is growing in stature and becoming a beacon of hope to the local community. Children are happy at St. John's and as a consequence parents are also happy. The Head Teacher's calm and committed approach serves to generate confidence in the governors and the staff. There is still work to be done but there is no sense that either the governors or the Head Teacher will shirk from the responsibility of this. As a Catholic school, St. John's it a credit to the Diocese and to the Parish community of St. James to which it belongs.

Sarah Adams  
March 2013